

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Research

Individualism is a common problem in today's society. In Merriam-Webster's dictionary, the word "Individualism" refers to a theory that emphasizes the rights of individuals in terms of political and economic independence. This theory promotes individual freedom in action, allowing people to pursue their interests. (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary). Furthermore, individualism is an ideology that promotes people's freedom and protects their social, economic, and political rights. Individualism can help people protect their interests from society. However, this condition can make people escape their fate as social agents. People are social agents born into society. They should live along with other people. People need each other to lead their lives. The social norms make them take care not only of themselves but also of society. This norm rules the way people act in their daily activities. Society should maintain its essential meaning and ensure the rights of the general people. However, some people are seeking their freedom, and this condition fosters a more individualistic mindset. This habit, if continued in the future, can cause people to lose sight of the essential meaning of society, and the social norms that govern how society acts will fail to maintain it. Furthermore, the society may become individualistic.

In the 19th century, individualism arose as a term in France (Peyre, 1949, as cited in Lukes, 2012), driven by the French Revolution. Individualism means prioritizing individual freedom over collective control. Émile Durkheim believed that individualism and society are opposed: more individualism reduces solidarity. Standards exist to balance societal and individual goals; however, when norms fail, anomie occurs, leading to isolation and alienation.

Initially, modern individualism allowed economic, political, and moral freedom. Over time, it became associated with egoism and alienation. According to Karl Marx, individualistic societies cause people to lose connections, leading to alienation. Relationships become utilitarian, and those with more resources tend to control society, thereby increasing inequality.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx divides alienation into four categories: from the product of labor, from the process of labor, from other laborers, and from labor as a human activity (Marx, 73). Marx posited that individualism and alienation are closely linked, particularly in neoliberal societies that foster competition. This leads people to disconnect from their society and work. In neoliberal societies, Marx observed an increase in alienation and a decline in genuine social interaction, resulting in mostly formal or transactional connections. Being isolated and individualistic is abnormal and disadvantages most people, benefiting only those who control the system. Literature often explores this scenario as a dystopia.

Dystopia is a literary genre that is the opposite of utopian. When utopia is full of optimism about society, on the other hand, dystopia is characterized by pessimism in its view of society (Mills, as cited in Pospíšil, 9). argues that dystopia was born as a reaction to the harmful condition of socialism in the late 20th century. World conditions during World War II prompted people to recognize the actual condition of the world. That condition became the turning point for people to lose their optimism for the future of society. Dystopia is also commonly referred to as an anti-utopia. According to John Stuart Mill, in 1868, a dystopia was defined as a "bad place" or a society that was the opposite of a utopia. Utopia is the "perfect society"; therefore, dystopia or anti-utopia is the bad place where people avoid living. The term "dystopian" in Latin consists of two syllables: "dys," meaning "bad," and "Topia," meaning "a space with specified characteristics."

This research explores the intricate relationship between individualism and dystopia, examining how the erosion of social norms can contribute to these conditions. Both individualism and dystopia arise when collective rights are neglected and social norms lose effectiveness. In such scenarios, individuals begin to prioritize personal gain, weakening societal bonds. This leads to alienation and the emergence of groups that exploit society for their own benefit. The research uses English literature, specifically the novel *Individutopia* by Joss Sheldon, as a case study to analyze these dynamics. The novel illustrates how individualistic mindsets contribute to the disintegration of social bonds and the rise of dystopian societies.

Individutopia is a novel that presents a possible future world, specifically in London, in 2084. This novel references Margaret Thatcher's theory from 1979. Thatcher's theory began the cult of individualism in the United States. Thatcher argues that in this world, people are born without the name of society. People are born individuals; a human can be a woman or a man. If they find each other, it will bring two individuals together to form a family. In the government, people cannot do anything except work with other people (individuals) who support them. Thatcher also argues that we must look at ourselves. This statement encourages Londoners and the English people to be individualistic. Since there was no such thing as society, it followed that nothing could be owned by society. Everything that was owned collectively had to be passed on to individuals. Hundreds of nationalized industries, such as British Gas and British Rail, were privatized and given to individual shareholders, who subsequently increased prices to recoup their investments. (Sheldon, 10) This condition, being the starting point of neoliberal ideology, became widespread in London by 2084. The novel was influenced by the neoliberal policies that Thatcher adopted in the United Kingdom during her period as Prime Minister.

In his novel, Sheldon described the social conditions in London in 2084 as places that were alienated from society. People live without interacting with others in real life every day. They only interact with the I-Other that they made before on social media. They are trying to make themselves look good by complimenting them. Social media is a platform for showcasing oneself and seeking fake attention. In their daily life, Renee, the main character, only lives with her avatars. Those avatars are

only friends of Renee when she wants to talk, find some information about others, and even have sex. This novel also shows that the economic system contributed to the rise of individualism in London in 2084. The oligarchs removed the working contract, and they are creating an irrational system of work. The nature of work has undergone significant evolution over the past century. Jobs for life were replaced with short-term positions. Zero-hour contracts became the norm. Those contracts became shorter each year and were scrapped in 2047. Without guaranteed employment, individuals have no choice but to search for a new job every day, competing with their peers to win whatever piecework the oligarchs are willing to give them. (Sheldon, 29). The new working system in London forces workers to be alienated from their jobs. In London in 2084, laborers were merely tools for oligarchs to reinforce their power in society, and they received wages that barely reflected their worth. The working system is only systemic in making the oligarchs wealthier; laborers produce products for the oligarchs and barely earn enough money to help them survive in London. Even worse, the oligarchs push people to be alienated from their society, with the system called being individuals. Oligarchs brainwash people as if there is no cooperation in society; people live only for themselves, and other people only for their competitors to get limited resources for survival in life.

Through Renee's characters, Joss Sheldon, in *Individutopia*, presents to the readers how bad the society where Renee lives is. The main character lives in a society where the oligarch's power is unlimited. The oligarchs perpetuate social alienation. Meanwhile, laborers often struggle to secure jobs with wages that reflect

their worth. Renee An Blanca lives in London in 2084. Renee is described as a girl who has lived alone since childhood. Her mother left her alone because people should only take responsibility for themselves, not for others, even their own families. Renee's place can be described as a dystopian society where the world runs on a destructive path. The places where people live are different from our current conditions. Oligarchs take advantage of something that, before, could be used by people for free. The monopolization of assets harms society. In extreme cases, oligarchs attempt to promote individualism and isolate society. The oligarchs want to exploit everything that exists in London.

The researcher analyzes Renee's society in London in 2084 in this research. This research focuses on the socio-economic structure in London 2084, described in Joss Sheldon's *Individutopia*. Society and individualism are the primary issues examined in this research. The researcher is interested in analyzing issues related to Socioeconomic problems, such as the social interaction between Renee and her society, and how Renee perceives herself as a human being within it. It also explores Renee's position as a disadvantaged laborer who cannot earn enough money to fulfill her life.

This research examines the socio-economic issues in London 2084, as depicted in *Individutopia*, with a focus on individualism and alienation in a neoliberal society. Key points include how Renee represents disadvantaged individuals as laborers and human beings. Therefore, this research addresses "Individualism and

Alienation in Neoliberal Society as Portrayed in *Individutopia*, a novel by Joss Sheldon."

1.2. Identification of Problem

Individutopia by Joss Sheldon is a dystopian fiction novel set in London in 2084. In this novel, Sheldon aims to warn the reader about the worst possible future that might begin today. People exist as a part of society. However, some factors push them into alienation and individualism. The researchers aim to explore the type of alienation that prompts people to become individualistic and to investigate the kind of policy that can foster such a trend in society. The researcher focuses on the Marxist perspective on alienation, based on Karl Marx's theory in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Based on Marxism, researchers aim to investigate the impact of policies implemented by oligarchs within the neoliberal ideology on society, particularly in the socio-economic spheres.

1.3. Review of Related Literature

To enrich the knowledge and information for this research, the researcher does library research to find reliable sources on individualism and alienation issues in the literature. These essential sources help the researcher gain more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the research.

To support this research, the researcher utilized relevant sources. The first one is a book edited by Katarzyna Ostalska and Tomasz Fisiak, titled "*The Postworld In-*

Between Utopia and Dystopia: Intersectional, Feminist, and Non-Binary Approach in 21st Century Speculative Literature and Culture." This book comprises 17 essays collected in one volume. One of these essays discusses *Individutopia*, written by Joss Sheldon. The focus of this research is to analyze the *Individutopia* by Joss Sheldon. This book analyzes *Individutopia* from a feminist perspective. However, in this research, the researcher focuses on the Marxist perspective. Ostalska also compares the idea of feminism in *Individutopia* with another novel, *Last Once Left Alive*, in the chapter "Feminist Utopianism in the Posthuman Worlds of Last Once Left Alive by Sarah Davis-Goff and *Individutopia* by Joss Sheldon." Ostalska highlights the novel's similarity to a woman as the main character. Both of them live in the new form of society and community. The role of neoliberal policies is contrasted in both novels. However, the storylines of both novels differ. *Last One Left Alive* is about a woman who must survive from zombies. This novel focuses on how the woman survives the zombie apocalypse. In *Individutopia*, Joss Sheldon focuses on society itself. In this society, people are becoming increasingly individualistic on a daily basis. Renee's journey consists of a critique of neoliberal ideologies. Ostalska highlights the resilience of women in a dystopian society in her essay. However, in future research, researchers focus on dystopian society and social problems in the novel *Individutopia* by Joss Sheldon.

The second source is an article by Sean Seeger and Daniel Davinson-Vecchione titled "*Dystopian Literature and the Sociological Imagination*" (2019). In this article, the writer describes the essential reasons why dystopian fiction is interesting for

analysis, supported by sociological issues. *Individutopia* highlights dystopian issues as the main topic of the novel, for example, the conflict of interest between the oligarch and the working class, the lack of social interaction, and alienation, which require a sociological perspective for analysis. In this article, the researcher believes that it supports the researcher's knowledge about the sociological issue from a dystopian perspective and also identifies related points about how individuals become part of society. Additionally, this article enables the researcher to explore the connection between the world in the novel and real life, where the researcher and the reader reside.

The third journal by Sufyan Al-Dmour is titled "*George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four: A Marxist Study*" (2020). This journal criticizes how people with power in Oceania manipulate society. Similar to the condition in London of 2084, where the oligarch manipulates society to be proud of individualism. The ruling party oppresses the two other social classes. Through this journal, Al-Dmour demonstrates to the reader that the ruling party exercises control over society through its regulations. Al-Dmour believes that in this novel, Orwell critiques totalitarian regimes. In this article, Al-Dmour presents his journal from a Marxist perspective, focusing on socio-economic issues. This novel also uses the dystopian genre. Through this journal, Al-Dmour argues that Orwell, in this novel, aims to portray the power of economics and ideologues to take control of society when they collaborate. This journal is related to this research. The social problem arises when individuals with power can regulate society to their advantage, as seen in both the journal and the researcher's work,

illustrating how the party controls society through strict ideology and class control. In addition, this journal can strengthen researchers' understanding of the criticism of Marxist theory in analyzing socio-economic issues where the party in power shapes society.

The fourth journal was written by Muskan Khan and Azhar Shah, titled "*When Labour Becomes Loss: A Marxist Critique On Alienation in Tagore's Kabuliwala*" (2025). This journal presented four types of Marx's Alienation. The alienation between Rahamat, the main character, and his family stems from Rahamat being a migrant worker. He should trade the dry fruit from town to town and feel separated from his family. Rahamat should leave her daughter in India to go to Afghanistan to sell the fruits. The writer believed that even though Rahamat supports her daughter financially, this work separates him from his daughter. Even more, in Afghanistan, Rahamat was treated as an outsider, which means Rahamat cannot build a real relationship with others. Muskan Khan believed that Rahamat lost his identity because the economic problem caused a loss of personal relationships and emotional bonds as a human being. The writer shows how the financial system and capitalism can create emotional and social distance in this article. This condition is similar to Renee's condition in London in 2084; in Renee's society, people spend almost all of their time working or finding a job. This situation not only mentally and physically tires people, but also disconnects them from their society. People often lose their emotions as human beings, becoming individualistic and disregarding societal norms. The oligarchic system in *Individutopia* created a disconnect between people, forcing

them to focus solely on their jobs. The job in London in 2084 benefited the oligarch while the laborers were alienated.

The last source, written by Jiro Morishita, is titled "*Singularity of Capitalism: An Enquiry into the Cold War as a US Project and a Reading of Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451 (1953)*" (2023). The role of capitalism in Fahrenheit 451 is Morishita's primary analysis. In this article, the Marxist perspective is employed to critique the capitalist system. Capitalists avoid reading books in society, limiting freedom of expression and critical thinking. The writer believed this novel was a critique of the capitalist system. Capitalism forces humans to be disconnected from the freedom of thought, pure social connection, and meaningful jobs in their lives, such as the job of a book burner. The conditions between London society in *Individutopia* and Fahrenheit 451 are similar, where people with power control those societies. Those people exploit society to create a false consciousness, take pride in being individualistic, and avoid reading books. Those societies are being alienated due to the regulations imposed by capitalists, who seek to exploit society by disconnecting people from their knowledge, jobs, and basic human needs, as well as from society itself. Both Fahrenheit 451 and *Individutopia* criticize the alienation in society as a result of the abuse of power by those in control.

The previews of the resources above support the researchers' research. The researcher collected sources related to dystopian and Marxist theories in the essay. For this research, the researcher analyzes a dystopian society in London, 2084, focusing on issues such as the disconnection between individuals within the society,

the loss of human life, and the alienation of workers from their jobs. Therefore, the researcher believes those journals will support this research.

1.4. The Scope of the Research

The researcher focused on the novel *Individutopia* (2018) by Joss Sheldon. The researcher focuses on how the author represents individualism in society as the effect of alienation from the oligarchs in London in 2084. This research focuses on the type of alienation that led to individualism in London in 2084. Additionally, some policies contribute to the alienation that is occurring in society. This research presents an analysis of *Individutopia* using the theory of Karl Marx, known as Marxism, based on the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

1.5. The Research Question

This research will focus on answering some related questions:

1. How does Joss Sheldon in *Individutopia* present the Alienation in London in 2084 as the reason for individualism?
2. How do neoliberal policies in the London of 2084 support individualism?

1.6. Objective of study

This research examines how Renee, the main character, was part of London society in 2084. This subject is compelling in discussing how the society where Renee lives is influenced by neoliberal society, a society that disadvantages people without power. It also examines how oligarchs attempt to brainwash people into being individualistic, thereby creating alienation in London society. Joss Sheldon

highlights the neoliberal ideology, where private interests regulate society without government power to limit the oligarchy. This research examines how oligarchs intentionally foster individualism to reinforce their power by alienating society from one another, from human beings, and from workers, including those who produce labor and its products. This research also aims to explore some neoliberal policies that affect the way people act in society. Researchers also focus on how the policy can affect individualism and alienation in London in 2084.

